

Local oyster beds closed

Vibrio outbreak linked to area shellfish

BY SUSANNA SHEEHAN, EDITOR
EDITOR@DUXBURYCLIPPER.COM
TWITTER:@ DUXBURYCLIPPER

Last Thursday, the state closed down Duxbury bay, Bluefish River, Back River, Kingston bay and Plymouth harbor for oyster harvesting for a week due to five confirmed cases of people getting sick from eating local oysters containing the bacteria *Vibrio parahaemolyticus*.

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health and the Department of Fish and Game's Division of Marine Fisheries issued a seven-day precautionary closure of oyster beds in these areas effective Thursday, September

Continued on page 7



Duxbury oysters.
Photo by Karen Wong

Continued from page 1

24. "This precautionary closure is due to five confirmed cases of *Vibrio parahaemolyticus* linked to the consumption of raw oysters from the area and the presence of environmental conditions in the area conducive to the growth of *Vibrio* in harvested oysters," stated an alert on the DPH's website. The five people who fell sick have recovered. According to the DPH, *Vibrio* is a bacteria that thrives in warmer temperatures, multiplying as water and ambient air temperatures increase. The more *Vibrio* present in oysters, the greater the risk of infection.

"Current water temperatures in Duxbury Bay are consistent with water temperatures and environmental conditions that have been associated with *Vibrio* illnesses," stated the DPH. Harvesting and possession of oysters from these areas for commercial purposes is prohibited for seven days.

Duxbury Harbormaster Don Beers said the warmer bay waters contribute to the growth of *Vibrio* but since water temperatures are dropping, the problem should resolve itself.

"The bay is getting colder every day," Beers said. "It's down in the sixties now. That week off just gives them (the oysters) time to cool down and flush out."

“It’s a naturally occurring situation,” he added.

Beers said he really doesn’t have to police the oyster growers too much as they “are really right on top of the management plan.” A statewide *Vibrio* control plan has been in effect since 2013.

The harvesting ban means down-time for the oyster growers, he said.

“It will enable them to do much need maintenance and repairs. They can still be on their grants and sort the oysters but they can’t harvest them in any way,” he said. If there are more confirmed case of *Vibrio* linked to oysters in this area, then an extended U.S. Food and Drug Administration-enforced closure could be issued.

The *Vibrio* season in Massachusetts runs from May to October.



Oyster grows on the Duxbury bay mud flats.

Photos by Karen Wong



A bucket of oysters.